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# FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

FROM: AMCONGEN, LAGOS, NIGERIA

DESP. NO. 36

DATE September 15, 1954

REF: Despatch No. 12, July 20, 1954

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SUBJECT: Review of Political Events in Nigeria -- July 20-September 15, 1954.

Principal political events during the period under review have included the last meeting of the present Central House of Representatives (August 13-23); approval and publication of the revised Constitutional instruments, to come into operation October 1; meetings of the Regional Houses of Assembly, primarily to approve supplementary budgets and the establishment of Regional Marketing Boards; and the beginning of campaigning in the Western Region for the elections to the new Federal House of Representatives.

Meeting of Central House of Representatives - August 13 - 23.

A review of the principal legislation enacted at the last meeting of the present Central House of Representatives, between August 13 and August 23, has already been submitted in the Consulate General's despatch No. 31, of September 7. It included legislation to enable the Regional Houses of Assembly to set up Regional Marketing Boards and to appropriate funds for purposes envisaged in the revised constitutional instruments before the latter actually come into operation on October 1; authorization for the transfer of initial funds totalling £55,000,000 by the present commodity marketing boards to the Regional Boards to enable the latter to start operations; the approval of supplementary estimates for the current fiscal year; legislation to establish a Ports Authority; and enabling legislation for the establishment of a Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, with a national and regional organization, to supplant the present Nigerian Broadcasting Service.

The principal political event of the meeting of the House, and one which will doubtless have its repercussions throughout the campaign for the election of members to the new Federal House of Representatives, was the introduction of a motion by the Action Group's firebrand Tony Enahoro which would have called on the Council of Ministers to consider the adaption of minimum wage of 5 shillings for daily-paid workers. The motion apparently caught the NCNC off-base, and lead to a confused, and acrimonious debate in which NCNC speakers variously claimed that the measure had merit on the surface but required

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but required further study (Dr. Azikiwe), that it was merely a "vote-catching" measure, that the NCNC had two years ago demanded a 5 shilling minimum wage and was now thinking in terms of 7/6 shillings, and that (more pertinent) an inquiry was now being made by the government into the cost of living, which would provide a sound basis for consideration of the wage question.

After a prolonged verbal squabble between Western (AG) and Eastern (NCNC) members, it remained to Northern members to point out that the Regional Governments and the Native Authorities, as well as the Central Government, were large employers of labor and should be consulted. While sympathetic to the improvement of the conditions of the worker, the NPC would abstain on a vote. Ultimately, the motion was defeated by 38 to 18 votes with the NPC members abstaining. The more prosperous Western Region Government would, of course, be in a better position to pay increased wages than Azikiwe's relatively poor Eastern Region or the North.

It is worthy of note that Awolowo, the Action Group leader, who had found himself too occupied with Western Region affairs and politics there to attend the meeting of the Central House in March, was present for the August meeting. Thus all of the "Big Three" -- Awolowo (AG) from the West; Azikiwe (NCNC) from the East, and the Sardauna of Sokoto (NPC) from the North, were on hand.

Revised Constitution to Come into Operation October 1.

As reported in the Consulate General's despatch No. 32, of September 10, the revised constitutional instruments drawn up pursuant to the agreements reached at the Conferences on the Nigerian Constitution at London in July-August 1953 and Lagos in January-February 1954 received the Queen's assent on August 30 and are to come into operation October 1. The announcement of the approval of the instruments and their effective date aroused little attention in the local press. Among the principal Lagos papers, only Azikiwe's West Africa Pilot commented editorially, with the obvious remark that much depends on the spirit with which each of the "Big Three" (Azikiwe; Awolowo, and the Sardauna of Sokoto) leads his region -- that the Pilot stands for healthy rivalry among Regions, but is "irrevocably committed to the sacred task of maintaining a common nationality and a common heritage". The editorial quoted in the Consulate General's despatch No. 32, of September 10, should, incidentally, have been attributed to the London Daily Telegraph rather than the Times, the Nigerian Information Service release from which it was taken having erroneously attributed it to the Times.

Certainly the average Nigerian politician appears to be much more interested in the forthcoming elections, to the new Federal House of Representatives and the new opportunities for jobs and

more elevated

more elevated titles in the Regional Governments than he is in letter and the future day-to-day operation of the revised Constitution. He has been quite happy to leave the arduous job of translating the decisions of the Conference into a Constitutional instrument, and the problems of taking apart and re-shuffling the machinery of government between the Center and Regions, to the expatriate officers. Also, the eye of the politician is on 1956, when the new instrument, after only twenty-two months of experience, is to be reviewed and the question of self-government examined.

As matters now stand, it appears likely that the revised instruments will scarcely have come into full operation before they must be again thrown into the melting pot. While the new and relatively loose "Federation of Nigeria" should make for less friction between Regions than under the present system, the revised instruments, like any other democratic Constitution, will call for a spirit of compromise which is so sadly lacking among Nigerian politicians. Perhaps the best that can be said is that the period between now and August 1956 will provide that much more time for the Nigerians to gain experience in government and its responsibilities.

Meetings of Regional Houses of Assembly.

All of the Regional Houses of Assembly have met or are meeting this month for brief sessions, the principal items of business being the approval of supplementary budgets and the establishment of Regional Marketing Boards. In all cases, budget estimates are being revised upward to meet the additional costs of "regionalization" under the revised Constitution. The last of the Regional Houses to convene is the Eastern House, which is meeting September 15.

The principal event of political interest in the Regional Houses thus far has been the sequel in the Western House to the squabble between the AG and the NCNC over the issue of the minimum wage for daily workers, which had been earlier introduced into the Central House by the Action Group. The NCNC leader in the Western House, Mr. T. O. S. Benson, introduced a bill calling for a minimum wage of 7½ shillings (thus out-bidding the 5 shilling figure which the Action Group had introduced in the Central House). Awolowo, in his position as Minister of Local Government and leader of the Action Group, was forced to oppose the motion on the very solid financial ground that, if present wages for unskilled and semi-skilled labor employed by the Western Region Government were increased from the present range of 2/6-4/9d to 7/6d, it would mean that the Regional Government would have to spend £6,650,000 instead of the present £2,000,000 for such labor. If it subsidized the Native Authorities to enable them to make a like wage increase, it would cost another £3,000,000, and the net result would be that

the Region

the Region would be spending about £10,000,000 for unskilled and semi-skilled employees, out of its total budget of about £11,000,000! Other of his arguments were that it would attract less fortunate people from other regions, bring about an exodus from the farms to the towns, and force private employers to cut down on personnel.

Perhaps under the influence of his trip to India two years or so ago, Mr. Awolowo has in recent months been urging a totally un-Nigerian but Ghandi-like attitude toward the pleasures of rich food and drink. Along this line, he adduced the further argument that the "giddy" flight from 2/4d to 7/6d might well result in the worker spending the "windfall" on injurious consumption", to the detriment of his health and efficiency. However, he implied that the Western Region and its daily labor could stand a minimum wage of 5s, and challenged the NCNC to implement a wage of 7/6d or even 5s in the Eastern Region.

The NCNC motion was defeated on party lines by a vote of 40 to 11, before the Western House adjourned on September 11, and the ball is now in the camp of the relatively poor Eastern Region. The unfortunate fact is that both the Action Group and the NCNC have been playing politics for the votes of a largely illiterate electorate on an issue which the NCNC and the East, as well as the North, are ill-prepared to carry out, and which would seriously strain Western Region finances. It can become a thoroughly dangerous one, with the Action Group press already reporting with ill-disguised glee that 3,000 laborers in Port Harcourt have threatened to go on strike because Azikiwe's Eastern Region Government has declined them an increase from 2/9d to 3/6d. The same issue of a minimum wage for day workers will doubtless be brought up by the opposition in the Eastern House of Assembly when it meets this week.

It seems likely that the North will have the most to show in the way of quiet accomplishment at the September meetings of the Regional Houses. Aside from the budgetary and Marketing Board subjects which were to come before all the Regional Houses of Assembly, press reports indicate that the Northern House has adopted a measure to authorize the raising internally of £3,000,000 for the improvement of urban water supplies in the Region, and also a motion looking to free and compulsory primary education throughout the Region.

Elections to New Federal House of Representatives.

In preparation for its campaign for seats in the new Federal House of Representatives, for which the elections will take place about November, the Action Group has issued a lengthy platform on which it will contest the elections, devoting much attention to the subject of self-government in 1956 (which is anathema to the North) and to the iniquities of the NCNC. One of the planks would require

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would require that foreign investment in Nigeria be subject to a 51% participation (controlling interest) of indigenous capital -- i.e., from Government, public corporations, or Nigerian private individuals -- a requirement not likely to attract foreign private investors, but indicative of the thinking of the Nigerian nationalists. The NPC has issued a brief manifesto, devoted mostly, in general terms, to social and economic development. A copy of it and the Action Group manifesto is attached. Thus far, no current document of the sort has appeared from the NCNC.

Only the Action Group has announced a list of its candidates thus far, and this only for the Western Region. Except for present Action Group central ministers, the candidates appear to be all persons who are not currently members of the Western House of Assembly. The NCNC has announced that no NCNC member of the Eastern House of Assembly should stand for election to the Federal House unless asked to do so by the party. As outlined in the Consulate General's despatch No. 12, of July 20, under the revised Constitution the attractions of seats in the Regional Houses would appear to be greater than in the Federal House to an ambitious politician.

Campaigning by the NPC is just beginning in the North, and the NCNC will presumably start its campaign in the Eastern Region, where Azikiwe is said to enjoy an almost mystic hold on the predominantly Ibo people, once the current meeting of the Regional House is over. The NPC has stated that it plans (for the first time) to contest the elections in all three Regions, rather than only in the North.

In the West, which has promised to be the principal political battleground, in more than a figurative sense, campaigning by the NCNC started about the end of August. It got off to a thoroughly bad start, with disturbances in Ibadan, in which NCNC Western leader T. O. S. Benson suffered rough handling, and rioting in Oyo on September 5, in which Chief H. O. Davies (Nigerian Peoples Party -- NCNC candidate) suffered a scalp wound and bruises, and seven people killed (Congen's despatch No. 35, of September 13). Chief Davies tells me that when he arrived at the meeting in Oyo he noticed people with weapons (apparently cudgels and stones), and called this to a constable's attention. When the constable approached them, both he and Mr. Davies were set upon by the group. Subsequently, the situation clearly got entirely out of hand for a time. The government has temporarily called off all political meetings in Oyo, designated it as a proclaimed district under the Peace Preservation Ordinance whereby all firearms and ammunition must be handed over to the Resident, and appointed a Commissioner to conduct a special inquiry. After a meeting between the Acting Lieutenant-Governor, the Alake of Abeokuta, the One of Ife, and western leaders of the Action Group and the NCNC, the two parties agreed on a joint statement exhorting their followers to keep the peace, and agreeing that as a general rule the two

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the two parties will not attempt to hold meetings in a town on the same day.

The Oyo affray, and the lesser disturbances at Ibadan and one or two small towns, has cast a pall over campaigning in the relatively "advanced" Western Region. Meanwhile, Awolowo has postponed a projected campaign visit to the Eastern Region, on the grounds of pressure of official business, despite Azikiwe's assurances of a "friendly welcome" to him in the East, in contrast to the "wave of terrorism" in the West. Azikiwe went on to add that "whilst the Eastern Region will readily grant asylum to any political refugee or emigre, yet I must emphasize that Easterners resent intolerance and bigotry, no matter from what quarters they stem, and we will not encourage their importation into the Eastern Region without disasterous consequences".

The events and tenor of the present campaign as between the Action Group and the NCNC reflect adversely on the readiness and present capacity of Nigeria for self-government, whether on a regional or a national basis. This is particularly true when it is considered that the Action Group and NCNC strong-holds, the Western and Eastern Regions respectively, are the best-educated, and on the whole, the most advanced areas of the country.

It may be added that the forthcoming campaign will place, as usual, a heavy burden of responsibility on the British administrative officers who must see, on the one hand, that there is full opportunity for free speech and democratic processes, and on the other hand that peace and order are preserved. If a permit for a political rally is denied on grounds of likelihood of disturbances of the peace, they are criticised for not permitting free play of democratic processes -- on the other hand, if they authorize a rally despite reservations as to the outcome and trouble does ensue, they are blamed for not having kept the peace. The situation is complicated by the fact that there are only about 7,000 Nigerian (federal) police and perhaps 70 British police officers for a country of over 30 million people, plus a limited number of Native Authority police, which latter are usually too closely linked to the local populace by family and tribal ties to be of much use in a general fracas. Also, when trouble starts at a political rally, the opportunity is usually siezed on to settle private, family, and tribal grudges which may bear no relation to the political differences which have served as the trigger to set off the fracas. This was the case in the Kano riots of May 1953, and doubtless played its part in the Oyo affair.

Governor to Tour Northern and Western Regions; to take Oath of Office as Governor-General October 1; expects to Retire next April.

The Governor, Sir John Macpherson, who returned to Nigeria from leave on August 5, is going on an extended tour of the Northern and Western

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and Western Regions between September 20 and October 16. Earlier this year, it will be recalled, he made a tour of the Eastern Region.

Sir John will break his trip to return to Lagos from September 30 to October 2, where he will take his oath of office on October 1 as the first Governor-General of Nigeria.

Sir John tells me in confidence that he plans to retire when his present term of office expires about next April. By that time he will have served approximately eight years in Nigeria, and have seen the country through troubled and eventful times. His patience and unfailing cheerfulness under often trying circumstances, including the abuse which the local political press is capable of heaping on the incumbent of the office if it thinks it can gain a point thereby, has been remarkable. Despite the unfair attacks which he has had to suffer from certain of the politicians, particularly during the constitutional crisis of a year ago, he has the real liking of the more thoughtful element of the Nigerian people, and his place will be difficult to fill.

It may be added that Sir John, who the reporting officer first knew in Washington ten years or so ago, has always been genuinely interested in and helpful to this Consulate General and its Principal Officers. The regular informal visits with the Governor, and the always kindly hospitality and courtesies which the Governor and Lady Macpherson have gone out of their way to show, not only to the Principal Officer and his wife, but to staff members and to visitors from the United States, will be among the pleasantest of the Principal Officer's memories of Lagos.

Erwin P. Keeler
American Consul General

Enclosures:
Copies of AG and NPC manifestos.

Department pouch copies to London, Accra, Dakar, Leopoldville.

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